

CONNECTICUT EMPLOYEES UNION INDEPENDENT

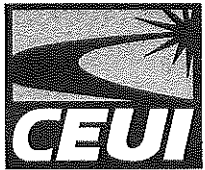
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**Testimony by Cara O'Sullivan, General Counsel & Staff Director
Connecticut Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 511 (NP-2 Unit)
S.B. 936 An Act Concerning Workforce Development
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Hearing
February 7, 2023**

Good afternoon Senator Slap, Representative Haddad and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Cara O'Sullivan and I am the General Counsel & Staff Director for the Connecticut Employees Union Independent, SEIU Local 511 - otherwise known as the NP-2 bargaining unit. Our union represents over 6,000 active and retired blue collar maintenance and service state workers who provide valuable services within our state facilities and on our state roads. Our members cook, clean, repair, plow and maintain Connecticut's State buildings, hospitals, college campuses, airports, roads, bridges and parks.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 936, An Act Concerning Workforce Development. My focus in testifying today is to voice a need for the State to create pipeline partnerships within the Connecticut Higher Education system which would train Connecticut residents in a trade or profession with guaranteed employment upon successful completion. Employment opportunities could be both within state service or with private sector companies that they could partner with.

Currently, the State of Connecticut is facing a shortage in the workforce in trades and CDL truck drivers. As a local who represents the public sector employees who perform such work, we have talked to many agencies who say they simply cannot get enough qualified applicants due this problem. Within the Department of Transportation, we currently have a Memorandum of Understanding which allows QCW Mechanics to be hired without a CDL and DOT will send them for the training to acquire the CDL during the first few months of employment. This was necessary due to the lack of candidates who had CDL's but were otherwise qualified even with recent pay increases



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with our new collective bargaining agreement. However, funding for that training may not be available after the fiscal year, so it is a short-term fix.

Additionally, we currently have a small trades apprentice program at the University of Connecticut which has been successful, but is woefully inadequate to address the shortage throughout the state. They are training a handful of candidates each year, largely from the local state technical high schools, while employing them in lower level maintenance positions until they successfully complete their internship. This is a win-win for the employer and the successful candidates chosen for these opportunities.

While we often focus on higher education geared towards more white collar type positions, it is time for the state to invest in the blue collar workforce. Jobs in the trades, manufacturing, and truck driving provide excellent job opportunities for many of our young residents who we want to retain in the State. These types of jobs are crucial to the infrastructure of Connecticut and should be considered just as important as other types of potential employment.

Our local is ready, willing, and able to help craft any programs with the Connecticut Higher Education facilities to help move our state forward in a progressive and meaningful push to true pipeline partnerships for trades, manufacturing, and commercial driving. We have conveyed the same message to those higher education facilities over the years as well. Thank you for your time and attention to this issue.